

Fact sheet: Xylazine involvement in fatal drug overdoses data from the Illinois Statewide Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System (SUDORS)

Participation in SUDORS is voluntary and as of this writing, SUDORS records data on 88% of all drug overdose deaths in Illinois.

What is Xylazine? Xylazine is a drug used in veterinary medicine. It is an animal sedative used for muscle relaxant and analgesic properties. It is not approved for use in humans by the Food and Drug Administration.¹

Illicit use of Xylazine. Xylazine is frequently used as an adulterant in mixtures of heroin, fentanyl and cocaine. It is often used to “bulk” up quantities of these drugs. It can also be used independently and ingested by smoking, snorting, injecting or swallowing.²

Xylazine and overdose reversal. Unfortunately, because Xylazine is not an opioid, it does not respond to naloxone, an opioid reversal agent. That means administration of naloxone to reverse opioid drug involved drug overdoses may be less effective.

Xylazine involved drug overdose deaths in Illinois by SUDORS participating counties Jan 2019 - Jun 2021

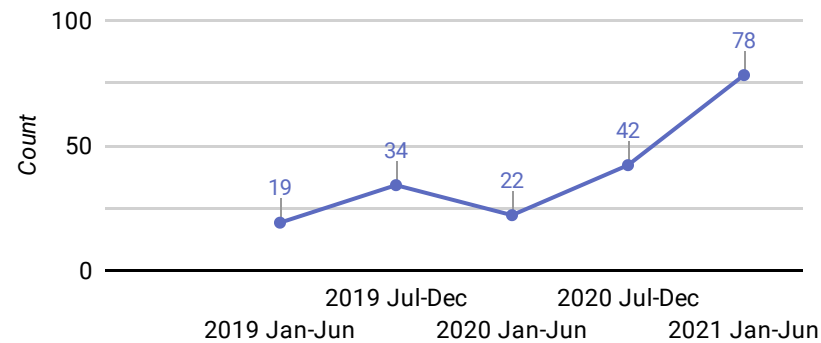
County	%	n
Will	6.2	12
St. Clair	4.1	8
Madison	3.6	7
Lasalle	2.6	5
Cook	57.9	113
All other counties reporting data to SUDORS*	25.6	50

* we are required to suppress data for counties with fewer than 5 cases for privacy protection purposes.

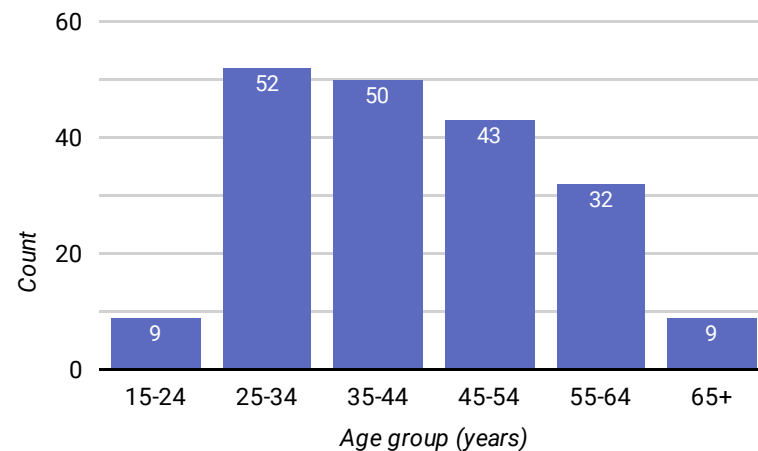
Substance tested positive (in addition to Xylazine)	n	%
Methamphetamine	16	8.2
Benzodiazepine	42	21.5
Alcohol	51	26.2
Cocaine	53	27.2
Heroin	82	42.1
Fentanyl	193	99

Administration route (how the fatal overdose drug(s) were taken)	n	%
Ingestion	21	12.5
Unknown	29	14.9
Snorting	32	19.2
Injection	49	25.1
Missing	64	32.8

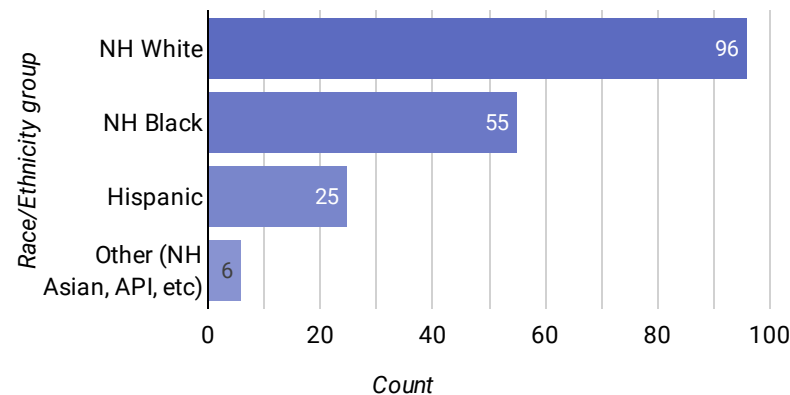
The number of Xylazine involved deaths in Illinois has increased steadily since 2019.



Xylazine involved drug overdose deaths Jan 2019 - Jun 2021 by age group



Xylazine involved drug overdose deaths by Race/Ethnicity: Jan 2019 - Jun 2021



FACTS: Xylazine involvement in Illinois Unintentional Drug Overdose Deaths

- From January 1, 2019 to Jun 30, 2021, there have been 195 unintentional drug overdose deaths involving Xylazine in Illinois. Of these 195 Xylazine involved overdose deaths, 77.9% (152) identified Xylazine as the cause of death.

- The number of Xylazine involved deaths in Illinois has increased steadily since 2019.

Demographics of Xylazine involved unintentional drug overdose deaths

- Over three quarters (76.9%/150) Xylazine involved fatal overdoses were among males.

- The largest proportion of Xylazine involved deaths were among 25-34 and 35-44 year-olds.

- Non-Hispanic Whites had the largest proportion of xylazine involved deaths in Illinois.

Fatal overdose circumstances

- Over one third (36.9%/72) of Xylazine involved unintentional fatal overdoses had reports of naloxone administration. Slightly more (39%/76) tested positive for naloxone in postmortem toxicology.

- Nearly all (95.4%/185) Xylazine involved fatal overdoses reported emergency medical services attended the scene. About one-fifth (22.7%) were seen in an Emergency Department prior to their death.

Underlying conditions

- Nearly all (92.8%/181) Xylazine involved unintentional overdose decedents had a known substance misuse problem. Less than a fifth (14.4%/28) had evidence of a mental health problem. Only 4% (8) had reported having an Emergency Department visit in the three months prior to their fatal overdose.

Conclusion

Xylazine involvement in unintentional overdose deaths is increasing substantially in Illinois. Of unintentional drug overdose deaths involving Xylazine, 77.9% listed the cause of death as Xylazine. The vast majority of these deaths also involve fentanyl. While the opioid overdose reversal agent naloxone was reported to be administered in over a third of these fatal incidents, it was likely not effective because Xylazine is not an opioid and does not respond to naloxone. The majority of those who died by unintentional drug overdose involving Xylazine were male, between the ages of 25-44 years, White and with known substance abuse issues.

Questions or Comments?

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1. Kariisa M PP, Smith H, Biting J. . Notes from the Field: Xylazine Detection and Involvement in Drug Overdose Deaths — United States, 2019 MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep. 2021(70):1300–1302 2. McAward A. Xylazine, an Emerging Adulterant. Tactical Emergency Medicine Newsroom. 2021.